

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white blazer over a black top, is petting a white goat. The goat is standing in a metal pen and has a white collar with the number '44' on it. The background shows other people in a fair setting with orange and white walls.

THE WCCS CONNECTION

CONTINUING A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

FFA ORGANIZATION CELEBRATES EIGHT NATIONAL TEAMS

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT IMPACTS ELEMENTARY

COMMITMENT TO STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Cover Photo by Jacquelyn Werstler

WELCOME, WCCS FAMILY!

As we bring the first nine weeks of the 2024/2025 school year to a close, I want to commend our students, staff, and families for their hard work and dedication. Our teachers have been working tirelessly to ensure our students are learning and growing, and I am proud of the progress I have seen so far.

I hope families took advantage of the student/parent/teacher conferences. This is a valuable opportunity to meet with your child's teachers, discuss their academic progress, and find ways to further support their learning.

In this newsletter you will find several inspiring stories I would like to highlight:

- Our marching band program continues to grow under the direction of Laura Gaff and Olivia Leitch. There are more students participating and I am thrilled to share that our band's performances are stronger than ever.
- Please join me in congratulating our Teacher of the Month, Mrs. Shelly Eberly, and our Staff Member of the Month, Mrs. Katie Kellam. Their commitment to our students is truly admirable.
- Our FFA students and teams have won national acclaim. I am proud of their hard work and passion for agricultural education; I also wish to thank their many coaches.
- Eagle Scout Evan Leatherman completed his Eagle project at Mary Raber Elementary School, building a beautiful outdoor classroom space for our students to enjoy. Thank you, Evan, for your service to our community.
- Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of working together to ensure the safety of our students. Mr. Kuhmichel wrote a short article for this Connection, which merits your attention. Our schools are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment, but we need the support of our families to achieve this goal. Please continue to follow all safety protocols and communicate with us any time you see or hear something that causes you concern.

Thank you once again for your ongoing support of WCCS schools. I am excited to see what great things are in store for the rest of the school year!

Sincerely,



Dr. Laura McDermott, Ed.D.
WCCS Superintendent



2024 WCCS Teacher of the Year Finalists and 2024 WCCS Staff Member of the Year Finalists
(L to R) Alissa Roberts, Amy Shearer, Erin Fudge, Jill Lickey, Steve Corbin and Tanya Yager
Bottom: Shelley Eberly, September Teacher of the Month (L); Katie Kellam, Sept. Staff of the Month

WCCS CELEBRATES EXCELLENCE

Last issue we featured our Teacher of the Year, **Erin Fudge** and Staff Member of the Year, **Steve Corbin**, from the 2023/2024 school year. They respectively won a new car to drive and a \$1,000 check sponsored by City Automall.

The Fudge family purchased a car in August from City Chevy. Instead of driving a new car, City Automall gave a monetary sum toward the purchase of that vehicle.

"I am extremely humbled and thankful by this generous gesture. I love our community and it truly is one of my greatest honors that I have the privilege to teach some of our youngest learners" said Erin Fudge, 2024 WCCS Teacher of the Year.

Staff Member of the Year Steve Corbin and his wife saved their awarded check.

"We deposited the amount in our savings account for a possible future adventure," Corbin said.

New this year, students, staff, parents and our community can nominate teachers

and staff members for Teacher of the Month and Staff Member of the Month to recognize the incredible educators making a difference in the lives of our students every day.

Each month, we will honor a WCCS teacher and a WCCS staff member who go above and beyond, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, innovative teaching methods, and fostering a positive, engaging learning environment. These exemplary educators embody the WCCS values of Eagle P.R.I.D.E. - Persistence, Respectfulness, Initiative, Dependability, and Efficiency.

The nominations are reviewed by a selection committee and the monthly finalists will be considered for the 2025 Teacher of the Year.

Thank you to our generous prize sponsors for their commitment to our excellence.

Nominate your favorite WCCS employee on wccsonline.com or on our Whitley County Consolidated Schools Facebook.



CONTINUING A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

If you step into the band room at Columbia City High School or Indian Springs Middle School, you'll be met with the sound of dedicated musicians perfecting their craft. Under the direction of **Olivia Leitch** and **Laura Gaff**, these band programs have experienced tremendous growth and success in recent years, continuing a tradition of excellence that is inspiring the next generation of young musicians.

At the heart of this transformation is the consistency and expertise of Leitch and Gaff. Leitch is in her first year at WCCS, and Gaff is in her second.

"Consistency in leadership is key," said Gaff. "Olivia and I have worked hard to build a strong foundation and a culture of commitment and excellence within our programs."

This commitment has paid dividends, as both the high school and middle school bands have seen significant growth in their ranks. The Columbia City High School Marching Band, in particular, continues to grow with their dynamic performances and impressive achievements.

"We are up 10 members from last year with 52 students in the marching band. Our goal in the next five years is to have 80 students. These students have been consistently earning ratings at competitions," Gaff said.

The growth in the marching band has had a ripple effect throughout the entire program. "As the marching band has grown, we've seen a corresponding increase in the numbers of students joining our concert bands as well," Leitch explains. "The excitement and energy generated by the marching band has inspired more students to get involved in our overall band program."

This uptick in participation has allowed Leitch and Gaff to expand the breadth and depth of the band's offerings. In addition to the marching and concert bands, the program now includes a jazz ensemble, a percussion ensemble, and various

chamber groups, providing students with a diverse range of musical experiences.

"We want to give our students as many opportunities as possible to explore different aspects of music. By offering a variety of ensembles and performance opportunities, we're able to nurture the unique talents and interests of each student as early as sixth grade," Gaff said.

The dedication and hard work of Leitch and Gaff have not gone unnoticed. Both directors have been recognized for their outstanding teaching, earning accolades and awards from their peers and the community.

"Olivia and Laura are exceptional educators who truly care about their students. Their unwavering commitment to excellence has transformed these band programs, and the impact they've had on our young musicians is truly inspiring," said WCCS Superintendent, Dr. Laura McDermott.

As the Columbia City High School and Indian Springs Middle School bands continue to grow and thrive, the future looks bright. Leitch and Gaff are committed to building on their success, nurturing the next generation of talented musicians and fostering a love of music that will last a lifetime.

"Our goal is to create a legacy of excellence. We want our students to not only become accomplished musicians but to also develop the character, discipline, and teamwork skills that will serve them well throughout their lives. We couldn't do this alone, we want to extend an appreciation to our Band Booster parents and members too who work so hard with us and our students," Leitch said.

With Leitch and Gaff at the helm, the Columbia City High School and Indian Springs Middle School bands are well on their way to achieving that goal, inspiring the community and setting a new standard for musical excellence.



Photo by Tony Flanagan. CCHS Marching Eagles compete at Carroll Challenge of the Bands on Sept. 21, 2024

COLUMBIA CITY FFA MEMBERS TAKE ON SEVERAL NATION

Story Submitted by CCHS Alum (2023) and Oklahoma State University Student, Baylee Smith.

Eight Columbia City FFA teams and one individual are set to compete in national agricultural contests through January.

The first of many contests is the state-winning dairy judging team comprised of **Karaline Schuman**, **Carly Linnemeier** and **Lorin Miller**. These students competed on September 30 at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin and placed fifth. Coached by Skylar Campbell, the group is the school's first national dairy judging team to place in the Top 5. Schuman and Linnemeier both earned the title of "All American."

Lauren Rouch, **Brant Pettigrew**, **Landin Parrish** and **Hallie Michel** attended the Keystone International Livestock Exposition in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to compete in the livestock evaluation contest. In this contest, students evaluate and rank beef cattle, sheep and swine according to industry standards. Each species has both market and breeding classes. The team won at the National Contest and Lauren Rouch was the top individual of the whole contest. Congratulations!

The Indiana state runner-up meats judging team attended the American Royal National 4-H Meats Contest in Manhattan, Kansas from October 15 to 16. Skylar Campbell also coaches this four-person team, comprised of **Karaline Schuman**, **Carly Linnemeier**, **Kolt Kyler** and **Logan Francis**.



Skylar Campbell, Lorin Miller, Karaline Schuman, and Carly Linnemeier compete at National Dairy Contest.



Carly Linnemeier, Karaline Schuman, Logan Francis and Kolt Kyler pose during a Meats Contest.

In this contest, students evaluate animal carcasses and meat cuts. They rank the carcasses and cuts based on their quality and yield grade, as well as identify different cuts of meat and if they are for wholesale or retail purposes.

"Being involved in so many national contests definitely comes with a lot of pressure, but it is also an extremely beneficial experience," said Karaline Schuman, the Columbia City FFA President and member of four national teams. "It provides a unique experience for me to grow as I work on time management skills and learning new things. It also allows me to represent my community and state amongst some of the most talented individuals across the nation."

Coached by Travis Olinske, the Columbia City FFA Junior and Senior teams both won the State Horticulture Contest and competed at their National Contest, too. High school and middle school students attended the American Junior Horticulture Association Contest in Lincoln, Nebraska from October 10 to October 14. CCHS students include **Olivia Stemen**, **Jessa Hoskins**, **Josie Trahin** and **Cora Western**. ISMS students include **Charlotte Cormany**, **Brooke Landers**, **Clay Linnemeier**, **Alex Branning** and **Morgan Furthmiller**.

The Whitley County 4-H Horse Team competed at the Quarter Horse Congress. The team includes **Calvin Evans**, **Elaina Leach**, **Kaylee Perry** and **Carmin Gayheart**. The team is coached by Shari Shively and evaluated classes of horses in



National trip winning livestock evaluators. (Top row) Kolt Kyler, Karaline Schuman, Logan Francis and Carly Linnemeier. (Middle row) Landin Parrish, Brant Pettigrew, Lauren Rouch and Hallie Michael. (Bottom row) Logan Hurley, Lucas Francis, Carter Bills, Charlotte Cormany.

AL CONTESTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY



National Horse Team. Calvin Evans, Kaylee Perry, Carmin Gayheart and Elaina Leach. halter and riding performance classes.

At the 2024 Indiana State FFA Convention this past June, the Columbia City FFA Agricultural Sales Team, comprised of **Lorin Miller, Karaline Schuman, Caden Poling** and **Kyle Porter**, placed first. The team competed at the 2024 National FFA Convention in Indianapolis.

“I feel being able to compete in the national ag sales contest has given me a unique opportunity to showcase what I have been working towards for the past few months,” said Caden Poling, a recent Columbia City High School graduate and member of the state-winning agricultural sales team. “I am excited to represent my state at the national level.”

Logan Good, Kaytlynn Bryant, Lilliane Patterson and **Jessa Hoskins** also competed at National Convention in the Veterinary Science contest, which is coached by Sarah Furthmiller.

Individual, **Kyle Porter**, competed at the National FFA Convention with his Agricultural Mechanic Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Proficiency.

The National FFA Organization recognizes FFA members



Top: Cate Cormany, Jessa Hoskins, Isabelle Lane, Olivia Stemen, Cora Western, Ethan Schuman, Tyler Hoskins, Josie Trahin
Bottom: Morgan Furthmiller, Jacob McGregor, Brooke Landers, Alex Branning, Clay Linnemeier, Charlotte Cormany



Caden Poling, Kyle Porter, Lorin Miller and Karaline Schuman compete in Ag Sales at the Indiana FFA Convention.



Jessa Hoskins, Logan Good, Lilliane Patterson and **Kaytlynn Bryant** will compete at the National FFA Convention in the Veterinary Science contest. who have developed specialized skills through supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs). These skills can be applied to future careers. Kyle’s time and experience at Rosencran’s Truck Repair helped earn this honor.

Continuing into January 2025, **Karaline Schuman, Carly Linnemeier, Kolt Kyler** and **Logan Francis** are set to compete at the Western National Roundup Livestock Judging Contest in Denver, Colorado. Similar to the judging competition in Pennsylvania, members will judge 12 classes of livestock, including beef, swine and goats or sheep. Columbia City FFA members were the high overall team at the 2024 contest and members are working diligently to retain the champion title. The FFA Livestock Judging Teams are coached by Greg Rupert and Jacquelyn Werstler.

Columbia City FFA success is a strong tradition and dates back to 1929. The FFA Advisors are **Travis Olinske** and **Makayla Myer** at Indian Springs Middle School and **Skylar Campbell** and **Sarah Furthmiller** at Columbia City High School.

Supported by the Columbia City FFA Boosters, community and alumni, FFA brings together premier leadership, career success and personal growth.

FFA is offered to any student grades 6-12 at WCCS and you do not have to have an agricultural background to participate.

WCCS STUDENT SAFETY CONCERNS YOU

In an era of evolving technological threats, the responsibility of protecting our children at school has never been more critical. As parents and members of the community, we all have a crucial role to play in ensuring the safety and well-being of our young people.

One of the most important steps we can take is to closely monitor our children's phone and screen use. In today's digital landscape, our kids are exposed to a myriad of online dangers, from cyberbullying and predatory behavior to the spread of misinformation and the temptation of risky choices. By actively engaging with our children's digital lives, we can help them navigate these challenges and make informed decisions.

"It's not easy, but having open and honest conversations with our kids about the potential consequences of their online actions is essential," said **Lyle Kuhmichel**, WCCS Director of Student Safety. "We need to create an environment where they feel comfortable coming to a trusted adult with their concerns and questions, and where we can guide them towards making choices that will positively impact their lives."

But the responsibility doesn't stop there. As a community, we must also be vigilant in identifying and addressing the underlying threats that can lead to disturbances and violence

at school. This may involve difficult discussions about mental health, social pressures, and the complex issues that our youth face on a daily basis.

"It's not enough to simply react to incidents after the fact. We need to proactively work with our schools, law enforcement, and mental health professionals to identify potential risks and intervene before they escalate. By fostering a culture of open communication and collaboration, we can create a safer, more supportive environment for our children," Kuhmichel said.

Ultimately, the protection of our children is a shared responsibility, one that requires the active participation of parents, educators, and the broader community. By taking a comprehensive approach that addresses both the digital and physical threats to our students, we can help them navigate the challenges of adolescence and empower them to make choices that will shape their futures in positive and meaningful ways.

Our children are our most precious resource. By working together, we can ensure that they have the tools and support they need to thrive, both in school and in life. It's a responsibility we all share, and one that we must take seriously if we want to secure the safety and well-being of the next generation.

COMMITMENT TO STUDENT ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

WCCS's strategic plan outlines a comprehensive vision for student success, centered around five key areas: Personalized Learning, Future-Ready Skills, Nurturing School Cultures, Community Partnerships, and Effective Leadership. These pillars form the foundation for their "Student Essential Experiences" – a set of carefully curated opportunities designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset to thrive.

Already this year, fifth grade has experienced Conservation/Field Day, third grade has traveled to City Hall, CC Fire Department and walked around the Whitley County Courthouse, sixth grade experienced advanced manufacturing tours, and more. Each grade level has at least one essential experience per year to align with career exploration, career focus and then after graduation planning.

The approach to weave essential experiences throughout the fabric of our curriculum and school environment has been instrumental in our success. From early exposure to career

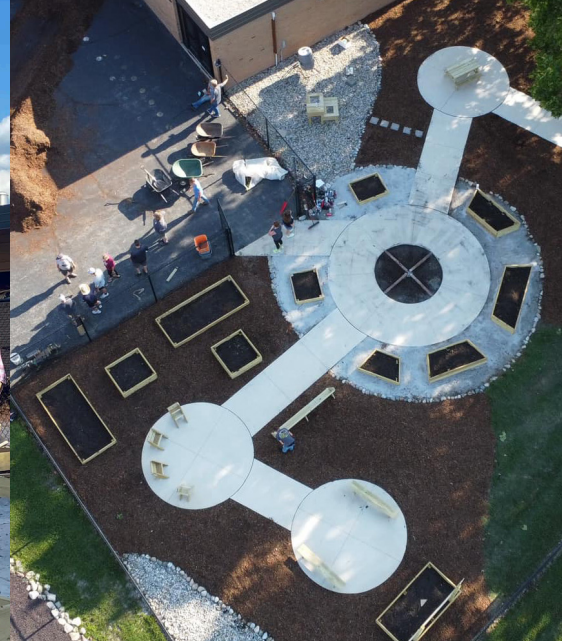
pathways and work-based learning opportunities to the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and community engagement, WCCS is effectively preparing students for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

By fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement, WCCS is setting a new standard for student-centered education. Our commitment to personalized learning, for example, ensures that each child's unique needs, interests, and aspirations are taken into account, empowering them to explore and pursue their passions.

Particularly impressive is WCCS's focus on building strong community partnerships. By engaging local businesses, organizations, and community members, WCCS creates authentic, real-world learning experiences that bridge the gap between the classroom and the workforce.

To learn more about our approach to education, visit wccsonline.com.





Photos by Mindy Leatherman. Evan Leatherman holds lumber for the project. Volunteers help with Evan's Eagle Scout project and an aerial view shows the finished playground addition.

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT IMPACTS ELEMENTARY

When **Evan Leatherman** embarked on his journey to earn the prestigious Eagle Scout rank, he knew he wanted to do something impactful. As a member of Boy Scout Troop 84, Evan had already demonstrated his dedication to service and leadership, but he was determined to take his scouting experience to the next level.

It was during a visit with his scout leader that Evan found his calling.

"I can't take all the credit. My initial idea was to replace the mulch at Mary Raber, it was my scout leader who asked if I would do something bigger," Evan said.

With unwavering determination, Evan set out to transform the playground into a truly interactive and therapeutic space. He planned every aspect of the project, from sourcing the necessary materials to coordinating a team of volunteers to assist with the construction and installation.

"Evan's attention to detail and commitment to excellence were remarkable. He took the time to really understand the use of our space and how we serve kids so that the final product would be both functional and visually engaging," said **Monica Ralston**, Mary Raber Montessori Director.

The result was a space that has quickly become enjoyed by the students. Featuring a variety of additions, the playground

now has new raised flower beds, several benches, chairs and new mulch.

Evan's impact extends far beyond the walls of Mary Raber Elementary. As an Eagle Scout, he has become a role model and inspiration for his peers, showcasing the power of community service and the transformative potential of a single individual's vision.

"Doing this project has been my favorite memory of my time in Boy Scouts. It's had the largest impact and I learned a lot. For the Eagle Scout project, I cannot complete the work, I can only manage the volunteers. That was the biggest challenge but I am appreciative of my volunteers and my biggest helper, my dad, Scott Leatherman," Evan said.

As Evan looks toward the future, he remains committed to using his scouting experience and leadership skills to continue making a positive impact. Evan currently interns with Chain O' Lakes State Park for his senior year and plans to attend college for a degree in Biology and a minor in Environmental Science.

As he soars to new heights, Evan Leatherman has proven that with vision, determination, and a heart for service, anything is possible. Thank you, Evan for your work to make our schools and community a better place.

"BEAUTY AND THE BEAST" PRESENTED BY THE COLUMBIA CITY HIGH SCHOOL FINE ARTS

Gather your princesses and your beasts and plan to enjoy the production of "The Beauty and the Beast."

A production of the iconic Disney movie begins Friday, November 8 at 7:30 p.m. Additional shows are presented on Saturday, November 9 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Following the Saturday production at 2 p.m. is Tea Time with Mrs. Potts.

Tickets are \$10 each and the performance takes stage in the Columbia City High School Performing Arts Center. Enter Door 1 at Columbia City High School.

Purchase tickets by scanning the QR code or visit <https://shorturl.at/Ta4S3>



Connect with WCCS

WCCS Administrative Office	260.244.5771
Columbia City High School	260.244.6136
Indian Springs Middle School	260.244.5148
Coesse Elementary School	260.244.3351
Little Turtle Elementary School	260.244.3343
Mary Raber Elementary School	260.244.5857
Mary Raber Montessori School	260.244.5857
Northern Heights Elementary School	260.691.2371

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Feedback is Welcome

We welcome feedback, story ideas or comments. Email us at wccsconnection@wccsonline.com or call 260.244.5771.

Have a Voice in How We Communicate!



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By taking just a few minutes to complete the survey, you will help us improve our communication strategies and better serve our community.

We Want to Hear from You!

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